

The couple got into an obscenity-laced screaming match in the parking lot that got physical. Evelyn ended up with a split lip and a broken front tooth; Butch ended up with an eye that was so damaged by one of Evelyn's sharp fingernails he would require hospitalization, the services of an ophthalmologist. He drove off the parking lot with one hand pressed to his face to keep — it felt to him — his eye from slithering on its nerve bundle out of its socket where it would dangle sickeningly an inch below his jaw.

Evelyn, unaware that the entire congregation had witnessed the altercation, burst back into the church (the folks had scurried back to their pews when they saw her coming) and threw her hands into the air and shouted, "IT WAS THE RAPTURE: JESUS CAME AND SCOOPED MY BUTCH AWAY!" And in the third pew from the back door, Bob, who had been dragged in by his wife, Glenda, said, "Somebody's gonna come and scoop you up, you crazy bitch, and you can bet your ass it won't be Jesus." But the "HALLELUJAH'S" that swelled up after Evelyn's proclamation drowned out most of Bob's sentence, saving him from certain ostracism, and a probable beating.

#### THE ANDY WARHOL BLUES

Clete is stick-thin, but his beer belly — a jiggly little pot that hung over his belt — got him into the Old Fat Guys Soccer League with his portly next door neighbor, Ellis....

In their first game, Clete tried to 'head' the ball and caught it on the cheek. The impact turned his face into a momentary gargoyle and his comb-over swatch of hair into a gravity-defying fan, as captured by the local newspaper's photographer.

The camera also caught Ellis a microsecond after he missed a kick that was meant to score a goal from mid-field: his legs formed a V in the air, his chin sat on his chest and his butt pointed, from three feet in the air, toward the hard, cold ground.

The pictures ran on the front page the next day, and Clete and Ellis were minor celebrities for awhile.

#### THE LIVE ONES

The two women sitting at the table with Ellis Leahy were enormous — at least three hundred pounds apiece — and painted and powdered to kill. Their coiffures were short



and stiff affairs that gleamed metallicly, one copper red and the other shiny silver. Clete caught a look at the grinning trio and uttered two syllables: "Oh, shit," and he began sliding backwards toward the door.

"CLETE! CLETE, YOU OLD SON-OF-A-BITCH!" It was Ellis. He'd spied his neighbor in his attempted getaway. Clete abandoned the backward shuffle and turned and bolted. Ellis must have leaped his table, because he was able to (miraculously, considering the distance he had to cover and the dancers and cocktail waitresses and drunken yahoos he had to slalom through) cut Clete off at the door. Ellis wrapped a persuasive arm around Clete's shoulder and, his voice still booming, said, "CLETE, YOU OLD HORSE THIEF. HAVEN'T SEEN YOU IN A BLUE MOON. COME ON OVER TO MY TABLE. I WANCHA TO MEET MILLIE AND BABS."

"Those are the hot babes you wanted me to meet?" Clete hissed through the forced grin that was creasing his face. "The two live ones that you cut outa the herd?"

A phone call Ellis made from the payphone in the hallway back by the bathrooms (I got two live ones here, Clete — one looks like Joan Collins and the other like Connie Stevens, and I'm gonna let you have your pick) made Clete lie to his wife Juanita and sneak out of the house and barrel down to the Coast Route, to The 101 Club.

"Ladies, I want you to meet my buddy, Clete," said Ellis, bringing his hand down from his friend's shoulder. Clete began moon-walking away, saying "It was nice meeting you, girls." Ellis reached out and snagged Clete's arms and dragged him back. "Ha, ha. What a joker," and then to the ladies, "Clete's one hell of a funny guy, girls." Clete could smell their perfume: an eye-stinging cloud of what seemed to be a mixture of gasoline and lavender, tainted with tendrils of bourbon molecules supplied by their noisy exhalations. The red-haired gal (Babs?) spoke: "And he's cute, too." Her voice was a low growl. The other lady laughed, "Heh, heh, heh, heh," dragged hard on a brown cigarette and said, "Look, Babs. You made him blush." Ellis pushed Clete down in the chair between the two ladies and said, "Keep Millie and Babs company for a few minutes, Clete. I'll go get us some drinks." "Why don't you," said Clete, clawing onto Ellis' arm, "just stay here, my man. They got waitresses here, you know." Ellis pulled his arm away. "Too slow, Clete old man. These ladies are thirsty; they don't like to wait for their drinks." "Damn straight," said Millie. "Fuckin' A," said Babs, as Ellis gave Clete a little wave with his fingers and said, "Remember now, Clete: hands on top of the table at all times." This cracked Millie and Babs up, and Millie immediately broke the rule, shooting her fake fingernailed claw burrowing into Clete's crotch. Clete



said, "Uhhh," as his chin bounced off the table top.

Then Ellis disappeared, leaving Clete with the ladies, and their three-figure bar tab.

#### HOLY WATER BLUES

It was in the middle of the fund-raising pancake breakfast at St. James Catholic Church in Loma Alta, California, when Clete Johnson, sous chef in charge of mixing the batter, slipped on a grease spill on the floor and landed flat on his back and discovered a water spot on the ceiling that looked just like the Virgin. He called, from his prone position, to the head chef, Ellis Leahy, and told him that it was a miracle.

Ellis turned from the grill, a slice of hairy belly smiling out of the gap between his grease splattered t-shirt and grey slacks, and said, "Get up off your lazy ass and get that mixing bowl over here, Bozo!"

Ellis turned back to his pancakes and started flipping them, and Clete got up and dragged the twenty-gallon metal mixing bowl across the floor toward the grill. As he passed under the Virgin, a drop of shiny water broke away from her and fell into the middle of the fluffy white batter.

#### TEN THOUSAND INCAS LAUGH IN THEIR GRAVES

Ellis and Clete were headed to the beach in their brand new skin-tight Speedo swim suits: "Forget all about those damned boxer trunks," said Ellis, slipping his thumb under the waist band that clung to the southern hemisphere of his hairy beer belly. "The women love the tight ones." He pulled the elastic out and let it snap back on his taut skin. "They really like to be able to see the old equipment, know what I mean, partner?"

"Yes indeed," said Clete, looking down at the small bulge under the tight fabric in his crotch.

Ellis ran the yellow light at Loma Alta Boulevard and the Coast Route, then sped past the Whispering Palms Trailer Court and rumbled over the railroad tracks.

"And I didn't wanna say this, Clete," Ellis continued, "but your equipment's a little, shall we say, undersized."

"Huh?" said Clete.